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The Honorable Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
Hemisphere Summit of the National Congresses of the Americas on Freedom of the Press
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It is such a pleasure to be in the presence of so many distinguished guests and representatives of so many countries.

Your leadership across the Western Hemisphere is invaluable to the future of our people.

We are also extremely honored to have with us, today, the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, Dennis Hastert. Many of you know Speaker Hastert for his courageous leadership and his dedication to this democratic body.



Speaker Hastert and I traveled to Latin America late last year, where we were able to meet and greet leaders throughout the Hemisphere. I am reminded of his enthusiasm for the vital issues facing our nations and his true understanding of the region.

I also would like to thank my good friend Alejandro Aguirre for his kind introduction. Alejandro is a distinguished journalist with el Diario de las Americas who I consider to be a patriot and defender of freedom.

Today we welcome delegates from the tip of Tierra del Fuego to the shores of Alaska. Your long journey to the capital of the United States is symbolic of the symbiotic relationship our nations share.

In the past years, we have seen closer interaction between our governments. As a senior member of the House International Relations Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, I have seen new governments flourish and possibilities emerge.

These possibilities are key as we gather here today to address and discuss the vital issues of democracy, human rights and of course freedom of press.

The leadership of the Inter American Press Association in defending press freedom wherever it is challenged and advocating for dignity and the rights of journalists is essential for the ongoing advancement of freedom of the press, and more broadly, the freedom of expression in Latin America.

I applaud the hard work and dedication of every journalist, writer, producer and news distributor for their unwavering work in bringing the news to millions of Latin Americans across the Hemisphere.

Recent reports by the Committee for the Protection of Journalists show the progress in Latin America.

In Mexico, the Court of Appeals upheld the conviction of the murder of a journalist working with the Huichol Indians.

Many countries in Latin America have adopted freedom of information laws, important steps toward guaranteeing citizens' access to information.

The struggle for freedom of the press continues to remain a in the region.

Inside Cuba, the terrorist regime of Castro and his cronies have launched an all-out assault against the opposition and the independent press.

The crackdown—which made Cuba one of the world's leading jailers of journalists, second only to China—was the latest assault in an ongoing campaign of repression and intimidation by the regime to maintain the veil of censorship on the Cuban people.

We, in the United States Congress, will remain vigilant and committed to the sanctity of freedom of press. The people of Latin America deserve unabated and unobstructed flow of information.

As stated in the Inter-American Democratic Charter, "The peoples of the Americas have a right to democracy and their governments have an obligation to promote and defend it."

Freedom of the press is essential to democratic values. The people of Latin America are a proud people with a great destiny.

As a senior Member of the House International Relations Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, and member of the Human Rights Caucus, I have fought for the rights of our friends and colleagues in our Hemisphere.

Specifically affecting freedom of the press, I authored language that authorized funding for the OAS Special Rapporteur for Freedom of expression in the Western Hemisphere to ensure that this office has the necessary resources to monitor and promote this fundamental right.

Most recently, I chaired a briefing that addressed the current human rights situation in Venezuela – inviting the Department of State, various non-governmental organizations and Venezuelans who personally suffered human rights abuses.

I also led my colleagues in the House International Relations Committee in personally meeting with Ambassadors from Europe and Latin America to discuss the 60th Session United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

The needed growth of Latin America will entail a more integrated America where nations enjoy the same privileges.

As our peoples from across the continent tackle difficult problems and embrace freedom of press, democracy and the protection of human rights, I am positive that your commitment and hard work will bear fruit a grand future of great prosperity.

Your presence here today shows the dedication you have towards these goals.

Welcome and thank you for allowing me to speak to you today.